



Nebraska Department of Education

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High Ability Learning

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Culturally Diverse Students and Underrepresentation: Starting with Identification

"Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor."

- U.S. Department of Education



Underrepresentation of students who are ethnically or culturally diverse is, unfortunately, not a new problem. For as long as gifted education has been around, there have been questions surrounding equity. For the 2015-16 school year, the Office of Civil Rights collected data on the composition of schools and gifted programs. The results were disheartening, showing that African American students comprise 19% of students in the United States, but only 10% are represented in gifted programs. This is nearly 50% underrepresentation for African American students. Similarly, Hispanic students make up around 25% of students, and only 16% are in gifted programs. Additional data reveals startling information about tests. From 2003 to 2011, the percentage of African American students who scored "Advanced" on the 4th grade NAEP increased from 1% to 1.1%, while their White counterparts increased in "Advanced" scores from 5% to 9% (National Center for Educational Statistics).

One of the largest barriers for students of color is identification for gifted and talented programs. As the data suggests, Black and Hispanic students are often disadvantaged by testing. We know from the research that these students often score lower on IQ tests, which is one of the main ways



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students are identified (Ford et. al, 2020). Most often, the definition of giftedness or how it manifests is based on White, middle-class students. This means that students of color often go unidentified. Standardized, norm-referenced testing can be exclusive due to bias, and of the 7 intelligences mentioned in Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, standardized testing only measures 2 (Ford & Webb, 1994).

Additionally, one of the main sources of identification is teacher referral. While teachers are not intentionally exclusive, implicit biases as well as lack of training of how giftedness may display in the classroom for culturally diverse students. For example, African American students tend to prefer group-thinking, global conceptions, and concrete/kinesthetic learning, while schools are set up for less-mobile learning, abstract thinking, and auditory lessons. As Ford says in an article:

"Teachers are often the primary source of referrals, the gatekeepers of gifted programs. The lack of a sound knowledge base about their students' cultural backgrounds and learning styles decreases the likelihood that teachers will adequately identify, or recommend for identification and assessment, African American students" (1994).

Unfortunately, this issue is systemic. According to data from the Office of Civil Rights (2012), 55% of high schools in the country offer calculus, but only 29% of those schools with the highest enrollment of African American and Hispanic students offer calculus. Similarly, 66% of high schools offer physics, but of the schools with the highest enrollment of the previously mentioned minority groups, only 40% offer physics. This is just a small picture, but the lack of access to rigorous programming for African Americans and Hispanic students is prevalent.

Before we can change the system as a whole, it has to start in the schools. Knowing the issues is one thing, but taking actions to combat them is what we are tasked with. Luckily, there has been a plethora of research over the years to suggest best practices for identifying students from minority groups. As you read this, I challenge you to think about your school and the design of the identification processes. Are they inclusive? How can you implement some of the suggestions from the later sections to make programming more accessible?

Be bold. Be the advocate. Make a change.



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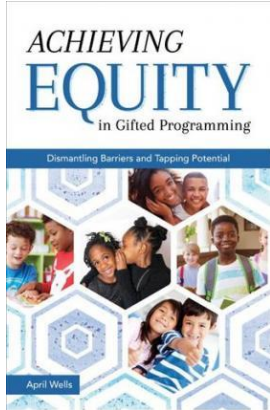


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Interview with the Author: April Wells – *Achieving Equity in Gifted Programs: Dismantling Barriers and Tapping Potential*



Achieving Equity in Gifted Programming, written by April Wells, is an incredible addition to the field of gifted education, especially as it pertains to equity. Ms. Wells challenges traditional thinking, bias and privilege, and how these apply to gifted programming. She has created a unique model, known as the Gifted Equity Model (GEM), which aims to create racial equity in gifted education, racially responsive, collaborative approaches to gifted programming, and increase in student belonging.

Through her own story and the story of her district, Chicago District U-46, Ms. Wells discusses where we are and where we should be going in the field of gifted education.

I had the privilege of doing an interview with Ms. Wells, and I would like to thank her for taking time out of her busy schedule as an administrator to make this possible!

April Wells has been through the gamut as an educator. Starting as a substitute teacher, she taught middle school for a year, moved to being a gifted resource teacher, and an assistant principal at an elementary school. Her current position is the gifted coordinator for a school district in Chicago—Elgin Unit School District U-46.

April's position focuses largely on improving equity in gifted programs in her district. In 2012, a lawsuit was filed by parents in district U-46, claiming that the gifted program was segregated. The district had a Spanish English Transitional School Within a School, which placed Latino students in a separated, segregated elementary gifted program. A federal judge found this to be discriminatory, and a program redesign was started with April as the lead.

Things such as implementing a Dual Language model of programming to honor second-language acquisition while delivering services, and a talent development program were at the forefront of her work. Ms. Wells explains:

“Our AIM (Access to Inquiry) program is a game changer, we support students then identify. At all of our Title I elementary schools, 2nd and 3rd grade scholars receive direct instruction from a trained gifted specialist in thinking skills... The habits of mind and critical thinking disposition allows us to dismantle barriers and access untapped potential. Students participate in talent development for two years and subsequently participate in



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our universal screening for gifted placement. By using local norms, we value the talent that is represented in all of our buildings..."

While April works hard in her district to give opportunities to underrepresented populations in gifted programming, this is a systemic issue that spans across gifted education. Some of the reasons for difficulties in identifying giftedness in students from diverse background that Ms. Wells cites are an antiquated view of giftedness, high cut-scores, and a national history of marginalization due to identity. As for improvement, she suggests "a shift from a deficit orientation around students and their families to a system focus...move from a deficit focus around students to questioning the faults in our system."

In her book, Ms. Wells developed the Gifted Equity Model (GEM) that serves as a practical approach to address underrepresentation. Adapted from the work of Adrienne Coleman, April describes her model:

"We can do something about underrepresentation, it does not have to go on in perpetuity. In the equity model, I raise awareness about the gaps...blindspots that run interference in gifted programming. Addressing barriers- cultural perception gap, opportunity or access gap, belief gap, excellence gap, identification gap and diverse gifted educator gap allows us to open doors for students who have been traditionally underserved in gifted education. Another layer of work in the GEM is Cultural Brokering. Cultural brokering is keys to engagement in gifted for CLED students. Lastly, attention to the myriad of ways we can support the scholarly pursuits of these brilliant students is a notable support that impacts how they enter, engage and remain in gifted spaces. our efforts to dismantle them are."

Part of what inspires April are her own experiences. She was an overlooked gifted student in elementary school, and this has driven her to better understand how to have conversations and turn them into actions. Additionally, being a Black woman helps shape her policy and practice. She notes:

"Occupying space as a Black, female, educator in gifted education in public education is a useful support in developing more inclusive spaces. Empowering educators to be culturally proficient instead of colorblind; common knowledge is not common and things are only self-evident to you and others who share the same world view and perspective. As a Black educator who believes in taking up space, being fully present in all environments, even when I am not represented in the dominant group, raises awareness about the ways we can reshape perspective so we have inclusive excellence."



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April Wells truly inspires those around her in words and practice. She is a champion for underrepresented gifted students, and she will continue to reshape the field with her powerful excellence.

This book is a short, easy read and is excellent for professional learning! You can purchase a copy of *Achieving Equity in Gifted Programs: Dismantling Barriers and Tapping Potential* at https://www.amazon.com/Achieving-Equity-Gifted-Programming-Dismantling/dp/1618218778/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=april+wells&qid=1600976708&sr=8-1



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HAL Spotlight: Shannon Clayton

The purpose of the HAL Spotlight is to allow you to connect and meet your counterparts across the state. Feel free to reach out to one another! Establishing a cohesive network is super important, and it reminds us that we all have one common goal—serving HAL students.

The educator in the spotlight this month is Shannon Clayton from Springfield Platteview Middle School. Ms. Clayton has been working hard to restructure the program at her middle school. She is working on her Master's degree in Gifted and Talented Education, and she has been able to apply what she is learning in class to her practices at school, and has been making research-based changes!



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What is your favorite thing about working with High Ability Learners?

I love working with the students individually, learning what their interests are and what motivates them. I'm constantly blown away by what they know and are passionate about, and I love how they want to share their experiences with me.

What are some challenges you have faced working with High Ability Learners?

I haven't encountered many challenges working with the students themselves; however, as this is my first year as HAL facilitator, it's been a bit of a challenge learning our district policies and state regulations so that I'm serving students to the best of my abilities.

What are some things you are excited about for this school year?

I am earning my master's in Gifted and Talented Education, so it's been exciting to be able to put theories and ideas into practice. For example, it's one thing to read about the educational and emotional needs of twice exceptional students, but it's a completely different experience when that student is a living human being sitting in my classroom!

What do you like to do in your free time?

Like most other teachers, I don't really have a lot of free time during the school year! During the summer, I love to travel with my family - anywhere where I can dig my toes in the warm sand and listen to the ocean waves.

Events

HAL Forum

Join your HAL colleagues across the state to discuss what works, what doesn't, and all things HAL! This is a chance for you to connect with others like you all over Nebraska!

Register at:

<https://tinyurl.com/yxmkwjsn>

Coming Soon:

In partnership with the University Nebraska Kearney, we will be hosting a webinar series addressing the social and emotional needs of High Ability learners. The target audience will be HAL teachers and school psychologists. The keynote speaker will be a leading scholar in the field: Susannah Wood. Some topics include 2E, MTSS and SEL for HAL, SIM, a student panel, current research, and more! Stay tuned for dates and times in the near future!

Please email event information and questions to sheyanne.meadows@nebraska.gov



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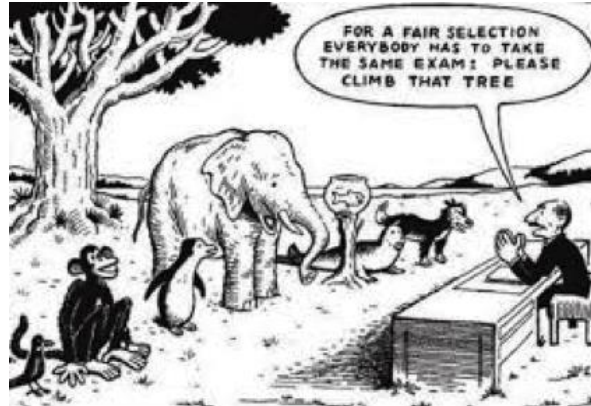


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Equity in Identification: Recommendations for Change



While we know the problem of underrepresentation and its pervasive nature, we also have research-based recommendations for change. Scholars in the field have been studying what works for identifying students from minority groups, and, after reviewing the literature, it can be separated into 4 categories: Assessment, Personnel Training, Cultural Responsivity, and Familial Involvement.

Assessment:

As discussed in the introduction, students of color score lower on norm-referenced tests than their White counterparts. IQ and other high-stakes tests are often the cornerstone of gifted identification—even if other measures are considered. When choosing an assessment instrument, one must think about appropriateness of fit. If the assessment is known not to identify culturally and linguistically diverse students, why use that specific test when there are other options? (Ford, Baytops, & Harmon, 1997). For example, most places use the Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children, but other tests, such as the Raven's Matrices, were found to be more effective (Saccuzzo et al., 1994). Tests that are non-traditional, such as the Torrance Test of Creativity or the Naglieri Non-Verbal Assessment, may yield a better result for non-White students (Ford & Webb, 1994). Using authentic assessments is another great tool. Using assessments that are part of the child's world (a problem with a potential solution and real challenges) can be a real asset when identifying students who may not perform well on a paper-and-pencil test. Using these and measuring a child's creative problem solving can give us a good indicator of intelligences (Callahan, 2005).

Additionally, multi-modal and portfolio-based assessments, including quantitative AND qualitative data, should be considered. Holistic measures are encouraged to get a whole picture of the child rather than an exclusive cut-score on a test. Information from teachers, parents, and the student, as well as assessing other things such as anxiety, goal awareness, and persistence, will allow educators to make a fully-informed decision (Ford, Baytops, and Harmon, 1997).



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Personnel Training:

Because teachers have a large role in identification, it only makes sense for them to have the proper training. Unfortunately, most teachers do not have the proper level of training for not only gifted students, but the manifestation of cultural differences in the classroom. According to one study, 65% of teachers reported that their education courses focused very little or not at all on how to serve high ability learners. Additionally, 32% said that gifted students were a low priority at their school (Farkas & Duffett, 2008).

Because students that are culturally or linguistically diverse fundamentally learn differently than their White counterparts, teachers should be aware of how giftedness may manifest in these students. Ford, Baytops, and Harmon discuss some steps to improving teacher recognition: gain early and on-going experience with minority and gifted students, understand cultural heritages of students, understand modalities and behaviors of minority students and how to use these modalities as a strength in the classroom, understand how to intersect their teaching style with the learning styles of culturally diverse groups, learn how to effectively communicate with families and students of varying ethnic backgrounds, and gain respect for the individual and group learning differences and achievement (1997).

In short, providing additional training for teachers during pre-service and professional development opportunities about working with different cultural groups is imperative to recognizing achievement in underrepresented populations.

Cultural Responsivity:

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) has been a hot ticket item as of late. Adapting curriculum and teaching to be culturally responsive helps all students, but especially students from minority groups. Leading scholar in the field, Donna Ford, created a model for culturally responsivity in identification and retention of student of color, consisting of 5 components:

- Philospohy about teaching culturally diverse students
- Create a learning environment that is family and community oriented; value diversity and difference
- Multicultural curriculum
- Instruction; matching teaching and learning styles
- Assessment that is fair and reduces bias

(1999)

Ensuring classrooms and gifted programs are equitable starts with this foundation of being able to address and adapt to differences that arise in diverse students.

Familial Involvement:

Data shows that when parents are involved in schools, the achievement of the student increases. Although parents know their child best, the involvement of parents from diverse backgrounds has become a stumbling block for identification. As noted by Marion (1981), minority families tend to be suspicious of the school system, fearing stereotypes, differing values and cultural backgrounds, and often have less professional occupations. This creates a disconnect between home and school and has a direct impact on the students. Family



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involvement in all stages of the process (screening, identification, placement, and programming) is crucial to ensuring student success (Ford, Baytops & Harmon, 1997). Creating parent forms that are user-friendly and sensitive to needs such as different language and reading levels, ongoing communication in multiple modes, and equipping parents with resources to promote achievement are all important factors in maintaining a healthy relationship with families (1997).



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